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SPECIAL ISSUE

Entrepreneurship education and learning and the real world

Introduction

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It is with great pleasure that we introduce this special issue of *Industry and Higher Education.* The papers that follow have been selected, reviewed and developed for publication following their original presentation in the 'Enterprise Education and Entrepreneurial Learning' tracks of the 36th Annual Conference of the Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) held in Cardiff in November 2013.

The papers are collected here to show some of the most interesting developments in academic and practitioner work in entrepreneurship education and learning. Collectively, they explore the utility of entrepreneurship education for the contexts of entrepreneurship and employment and the applicability of skills in 'real world' practice.

In the first paper, 'Freedom or prescription: the case for curriculum guidance in enterprise and entrepreneurship education', Rae *et al* investigate the effectiveness of policy-led frameworks for entrepreneurship education based on the expectation that it will result in value creation in the economy – especially pertinent in this time of economic recovery. The authors note that evidence of a direct link between entrepreneurship education and new venture creation is weak. They explore in some detail the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidance and a document on entrepreneurship education from Ireland's Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC), comparing the proposed approaches. Rae *et al* advocate caution among educators with respect to the influence of government agendas on the design of entrepreneurship education programmes.

In the next paper, Penaluna *et al* explore the case of assessing creativity through learning outcomes. The authors argue that the prescriptive nature of teaching and learning and the standardized testing of learning outcomes in traditional education may inhibit creativity. Some disciplines do not follow this trend, however, and pedagogies in subjects such as design seem to be highly effective in developing creativity that transforms into social and economic value. Since we know entrepreneurship requires and benefits from those with developed creative abilities, the authors suggest that there are lessons to be learned in entrepreneurship education from practices in the design-based disciplines. With regard to assessment, for example, they suggest that measures including cognitive process, design development and learning from doing and from failing might be more appropriate than discrete outcomes such as products or plans.

In 'Extracurricular business planning competitions: challenging the assumptions', Watson *et al* develop some of these principles further, examining the very common use of business plan competitions in universities. They note that these competitions are assumed to promote entrepreneurship and as such are legitimized as a beneficial form of entrepreneurship education, but they advise caution in the application of these assumptions. First, they highlight the danger that a focus on nascent entrepreneurial activity may exclude post-creation activity. Second, they point out that there is no evidence that those who enter these competitions want to be entrepreneurs. Watson *et al* argue, like Penaluna *et al*, that an over-reliance on planning assumes that nascent business activity is a rational, sequential process, whereas we know that for many established firms this was not the case. Thus, they contend, winning a business plan competition does not make successful business creation more likely and, indeed, not winning does not preclude business start-up success. In conclusion, Eatson *et al* recommend a reorientation in education from planning to implementation-based teaching and learning.

The next three papers are concerned with the skills developed by entrepreneurship education. McNeil *et al* argue that entrepreneurship and employment destinations for graduates are not mutually exclusive. Using observations from Manchester Metropolitan University Business School's Centre for Enterprise, they suggest that support for destinations that include entrepreneurship and/or employment should extend beyond graduation. This would provide more effective support as well as opportunities for ongoing knowledge exchange between universities and their alumni.

Also focusing on support and skills development, Refai and Thompson discuss specifically the entrepreneurship education case for pharmacy students. They report on a qualitative study of pharmacy employers and pharmacy educators in several UK universities. Among their findings is that evidence of enterprise skills development in pharmacy studies is limited, despite employers' expressions of dissatisfaction with graduates' functional business skills and tacit skills such as confidence, communication and initiative, often associated with business and enterprise education. The authors conclude that more needs to be done to prepare pharmacy students for the actual economic and sectoral environment they will enter when they graduate and that pharmacy educators might benefit from training to develop and integrate entrepreneurship education into curricula. The implications extend beyond pharmacy of course, and the lessons related here may apply to many vocational industries and professions and the educational provision required for them.

From an entrepreneurial learning perspective, Harrison and Kirkham's 'The application of reflexivity in small business research and implications for the business practitioner' provides some interesting insights. The paper reports the experience of a business owner in undertaking a study of his business over time. This ethnographic and reflexive case enables observation and understanding of the processes in a developing company in a dynamic business and social environment. The study is a deliberate departure from the usual methodologies of entrepreneurship and business research, which frequently focus on 'cause and effect'. While the authors do not deny that such approaches have their place, they argue that understanding of business is constrained by a lack of engagement with the idiosyncratic and dynamic. Harrison and Kirkham maintain that reflexivity in particular has much to contribute in terms of experiential learning for practitioners. Further, they argue that there are lessons too for entrepreneurship education, insofar as individuality and process and engagement with different perspectives of business, and how to do business, are worthy of pedagogical consideration and development.

The final paper, by Higgins and Galloway, draws together the themes of the special issue. It outlines the various developments taking place throughout the entrepreneurship education community, including the examination of why we do what we do, how we do it, what works and what does not work, and how learning is applied in entrepreneurship and/or in employment. The use of different learning and teaching methods, particularly those that afford experiential learning for entrepreneurial implementation, is also explored. The authors conclude that the academic case is made for entrepreneurship education and propose greater engagement with theory to further inform and develop the field. Contextual and socially-focused theory, particularly social learning theory, is advocated as a useful framework within which the study of entrepreneurship education and learning might develop.

As guest editors, we are very grateful for the contributions of all the authors and the reviewers. We believe that this special issue constitutes a valuable contribution to the field, particularly in terms of its collective challenging of the assumptions we make about entrepreneurship education and how we investigate its effectiveness and utility in the real world.